

Ivanhoe and the Making of Britain¹

Chris Worth

Department of English
Monash University

Abstract

Scott's *Ivanhoe* is more than a literary landmark or relic. The ideological work done by the novel has been underrated. *Ivanhoe* is a memorable narrative of a national myth: the synthesis of England from Norman and Saxon peoples. It contributed to the making and circulation of the analogous idea of a «British» nation during the imperial era. Highly popular in Europe, it provided a paradigm for imagining a synthetic nation bringing apparently opposed interests together. The historical fictions of the novel reflect a number of Scott's anxieties about contemporary political issues. Class conflict is displaced by the opposition of national and the alien. Scott's use of the Robin Hood legend demonstrates how he adapted his material: the first writer to link Robin Hood to a surviving Saxon resistance, Scott appears to combat Ritson's account of Robin as radical folk-hero by presenting him as a figure co-operating in a natural community linking all levels of society in resistance to that which is foreign, cosmopolitan, without stake in the land. The figures in the novel who cannot be accommodated within the newly imagined state must be defeated and exiled. Rebecca, as Jew, representative of commerce and science and perhaps as sexualized female, is multiply alien to the nation as imagined. Read critically, *Ivanhoe* continues to be an instructive text.

Key words: Scott, Nationhood, Fiction, History.

This paper began as a lecture in Melbourne in a series called «Landmarks in the European Novel». There is something rather depressing about calling a novel a «landmark». Who *reads* landmarks? We see them a long way off, on the horizon, familiar guides to territory we have long since passed by, or, perhaps, at best as signposts on the journeys we are still taking—but always somewhere other than where we are going. And we preserve them, unused or misused, or worse still, enclosed in glass. Is *Ivanhoe* such a preserved landmark?

1. This article is an abridged version of a lecture given by Chris Worth at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in April 1994. We are grateful to Dr. Worth for agreeing to shorten his original paper.

Can it be anything more? When Scott's novels were first published they appeared anonymously and their author was jocularly called «the Great Unknown». It has often been suggested he should be renamed «the Great Unread», for he is no longer part of most educated people's experience, despite his importance as an historical novelist among the most influential writers in nineteenth-century Europe. In this paper I want to reassess not so much the literary merit of *Ivanhoe* as its ideological seriousness. I believe the novel can still be visited as a functioning text, although it may now no longer be possible to *inhabit* it as some of its earliest readers did or as younger readers continued to do throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paper will focus on one motivated or interested reading of *Ivanhoe*. I consider it as illustrating a paradigmatic intervention of fiction in the construction of synthetic nationhood.

Ivanhoe, composed in 1819, was, Scott wrote in his 1830 «Introduction», a conscious attempt to explore new fields, being «an experiment on a subject purely English». In his previous novels he had used Scotland as his scene and dealt with narratives from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The abandonment of Scottish dialect and the engagement with English history were both, to my mind, aspects of a very deliberate widening of focus. There was the commercial prospect of opening up a new market. But I believe the novel was also motivated by Scott's recognition of the potential of his historical fictions to intervene in the turbulent political arguments of the post-Napoleonic period. Scott was an interesting political agent of the time, interpellated in complex ways by a variety of long-standing and contemporary discourses. He was a patriot, a great believer in Scottish identity and in the nation of Scotland as defined through Scottish ballads, historical narratives and literature, but he was also powerfully constrained by the need to support the continuance of the rational Union of Britain that had taken place in 1707, by his recognition of the economic value of such resolutions of ancient rivalries, by an ideological commitment to the value of a progressive and gradual evolution of the current constitutional settlement of the united kingdoms and by his engagement with universalizing chronotopes of Enlightenment and civilization. Not surprisingly, notions of nationality and the nature of national identity are anxiously at issue in almost all his political statements and major fictions. There are further complications: he had numerous strong social and political views, mainly Tory, conservative and anti-democratic in cast, typical of those circulating through his milieu, but the discourses of Romanticism also affected the positions he took on a variety of issues (earlier works include translations of *Sturm und Drang* dramas and his own romantic narrative poems, such as *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, indicative of his interest in Romantic redefinitions of humanity). The historical novel in Scott's hands becomes, in part at least, a means of exploring the fraught seams and ragged edges between these competing ideologies from behind the safety of a pseudonym or mask, of examining the disconcerting gaps, for example, between local or national rivalries and universal humanism, between feudal and mercantilist obligations, between subjectivity and society, between Enlightenment rationality and the new insights of a

romantic sensibility. Like some of the best of his early novels, then, *Ivanhoe* responds to political issues and social tensions of the day. Although it is certainly not the first historical novel about England (perhaps the first good one!), it is the first to have as one of its principal themes a sustained investigation of the nature of the English national experience in ways that also suggested an analogous construction of *British* and eventually Imperial identity. But the very success of its ideological positioning, its endless reproduction in the fabric of popular culture, has occulted the cultural *work* that it has done.

Stripped of its romance component (dealing with the disinherited Saxon, Wilfred, and his love for the Saxon princess, Rowena), *Ivanhoe* tells the story of the ending of Saxon resistance to the Norman Conquest and the creation, in the emblematic figure of Richard I, of a king who is «English» rather than Norman or Saxon, one who, «even more than Ivanhoe» is «a symbol of national unity» (Johnson, 1970, 1: 742), a king who has the respect (from his hereditary relationship to William I and his demonstrated military and chivalric prowess) of the feudal Norman aristocratic ruling elite, but also the respect and love of the «native» Saxon-derived yeomen and common people (effectively presented in the scenes in the forest and the interactions with Locksley and the outlaws). All this is made very clear in the opening pages of the first chapter, in which Scott sets the scene by describing not only a location and a period, but also an ethnic issue. From the blend of Norman and Saxon comes the pre-destined and superior ethnic grouping of the «English». The process supposedly has an analogy in the emergence of the English language out of Saxon and Norman. The reader is offered an image of a synthetic nation state *forged*², out of the providentially enriching merger of different races. *Ivanhoe* offers a powerful and memorable fiction by which a particular version of national emergence is given narrative shape. In terms of already available narrativizations of English national myths it fills an obvious hole, a part of history not touched on by Shakespeare, for example.

The narrative of *Ivanhoe* fleshes out the bare bones of the legitimization imagined in its opening chapter. For example, the description of the Saxon aristocratic world at Cedric's house and then Athelstane's castle is contrasted with the description of their speech: whereas the Saxon language is pointedly described as adding a «manly» quality to the new hybrid English, Cedric and Athelstane are shown to be failures at coping with the reality of political life, Cedric impulsive, short-sighted and obsessed by the past, Athelstane lazy, unambitious and selfish. The effect is to suggest effectively that the vitality of the Saxon culture has devolved upon the lower classes, initially represented by the loyal and resourceful Gurth and Wamba, but eventually given paradigmatic representation in the skills and competence of the yeoman Locksley, Robin Hood. Alone, the unalloyed Saxon world deserves to perish in the

2. Linda Colley (1992) brilliantly argues that the image of the British subject hammered out in the period 1707-1807 was the great sustaining myth of the Empire.

competitive environment of medieval life, but, allied with the positive features of Norman chivalry and education, it will flourish. Elsewhere the excesses of feudalism are emphatically associated with the tyranny of certain groups of Normans who have escaped the moderating bounds of either obligation to a sovereign (Bois-Guilbert or De Bracy with his «Free Companions»), Christianity (Bois-Guilbert and Front-de-Boeuf), or a chivalric code of honour (Front-de-Boeuf and Waldemar Fitzurse). Feudalism itself is not scrutinized and, indeed, the right of Richard at the end of the novel to disperse favours, grant rights of «vert and venison», and so on, is an essential part of the resolution of the story. The tyranny of feudal nobles in early medieval England is certainly historical. But Scott transforms this into one of the quintessential conservative motifs of British *fiction*: the motif of the absentee landlord whose bad steward exploits the poor or subservient. Whereas for generations of reformist thinkers the idea that the Norman Conquest imposed tyrannical feudal customs on a democratic Anglo-Saxon constitution had enabled them to conceive of an earlier, Edenic, nation-state, Scott ensured that the dominant image of the Norman chivalric nobility that survives from reading *Ivanhoe* is of its potential to contribute to «Englishness», once purified from corrupting «foreign» influences by contact with the people of the land and wood, under the protection of a just and hybrid sovereign. The parallels with the seven-teenth—and eighteenth—century creation of a Britain joining the best of Scots, English, etc., are patent.

Scott's construction of the state of English society in the 1190s is, of course, a fiction, not a generally agreed historical account but an artifice which shapes historical understanding as much as it reports a state of knowledge. What Scott does in the opening paragraphs of *Ivanhoe* is surely deliberate, not a failure to understand the past. He fills the poorly documented social life of Richard's reign with images derived from his own concerns, linking together several disparate groups of stories, while retaining a whole host of accurate (if sometimes achronological) and often documentary details about people, places and manners. As has been frequently pointed out (by literary critics and historians alike), not only is the surviving heir of Harold (Rowena) fictitious, but also the whole idea of a surviving Saxon culture. Saxon resistance had certainly evaporated long before the 1190s, indeed, in any organized sense had done so by the 1090s. Richard was an Angevin brought up as a Poitevin (Holt, 1989:183) and had as little in common with some of the Norman nobles as he had with most of his «English» subjects (nor was he necessarily very popular). The concept of an accommodation between Saxon and Norman laws has little validity (although tensions between central authority and independent power brokers were common whether the kings were Norman or Saxon and whether the local war-lords were dukes or earls). It is even uncertain whether the processes by which English evolved as a separate language can be described in the way that they are in the novel. Wilson, in his Penguin edition, gives other examples of anachronisms (and also a lively defence of Scott against pedantic criticism of his inaccuracies). More generally, the novel effectively

replaces the dynastic and religious concerns of pre-modern Europe with the administrative and national concerns of post-Enlightenment national states. And what is more, by suggesting that modern national formation can successfully be a synthetic procedure, it allows for nationality to be a process of joining, not just of separation. As such it can be seen to apply powerfully to nineteenth-century empire-building ideologies.

Let me here introduce something of the complex story of the novel's reception. *Ivanhoe* was published in December 1819 and was an instant success. The 10,000 copies of the first edition were sold by the publishers within two weeks (Johnson, 1970, 1: 686-87), an extraordinary result given the thirty-shilling, nominal retail cost of each copy. The early three-volume editions were followed by numerous others, eventually in cheaper and cheaper formats, widely distributed commercially and educationally. But the novel's critical reception was somewhat less enthusiastic than its general success. To summarize very ruthlessly, the initially mixed reactions were the result of varying degrees of interest in the subject matter together with varying degrees of distaste for the means by which Scott had made his material accessible to readers. Soon a distinct split develops in British responses to *Ivanhoe*. On the one hand, it became, and continued to be, a very popular text, indeed, so popular that it ranks almost with Shakespeare's plays, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* as among the most widely recirculated of all British fictional texts, if not directly, then in its echoes in most recent versions of the Robin Hood stories. On the other hand, it attracted considerable intellectual disparagement. There is room here only to sketch briefly the amazing spread of images, retextualizations, etc., of *Ivanhoe*. Some eighty-odd full editions of the novel had appeared within a century (Harvie, 1983:18). Six dramatic productions of *Ivanhoe* were being performed on London stages within a year of publication. There have been, some 250 other stagings of *Ivanhoe* since then, including a very successful operatic version by Arthur Sullivan, burlesques, even an equestrian version. There have been comic-books of *Ivanhoe*, and films, the first two in 1913, the best-known the 1952 MGM version with Robert Taylor, Elizabeth Taylor and Joan Fontaine. The best-known B.B.C. TV series appeared in 1970. Although some of the numerous Robin Hood stories familiar in popular culture are quite distinct from the novel, many still show the tinge of Scott's impact — e.g. antagonism between Saxons and Normans indicates intertextuality with *Ivanhoe*, as Holt points out:

Whatever strange fantasies Robin's name had aroused one was notably absent. So far no one had suggested that he stood for the oppressed Anglo-Saxon, the genuine Englishman struggling against the Norman oppressor. That role was foisted on him by Sir Walter Scott in *Ivanhoe* in 1820... There was nothing to support it. (1989: 183)

In contrast to its popular and commercial success, British literary figures and critics began to deprecate the novel systematically not long after its appearance. Thackeray's parodic version, «Proposals for a Continuation of "Ivanhoe"»,

later expanded as *Rebecca and Rowena: A Romance upon Romance* (1850), may have encouraged the development of an image of Scott's book as suitable only for youth. By the time the *discipline* of English studies was firmly established in England in the 1920s, *Ivanhoe* was seen, as Sir Herbert Grierson put it, as «mainly a good adventure story for boys», or, in Una Pope-Hennessy's words: «first and last a boy's book» (Duncan, 1968: 142). By the 1950s it had been deleted from academic consideration outside the community of Scott scholars—hence Duncan's defence of the appropriateness of taking the novel seriously in his revisionary article of 1955. This intellectual disparagement was, however, contemporary with the widespread adoption of the novel as a pedagogic text, as indicated by the memories of many people who went to all-male schools before the 1950s and by the existence of various school editions, in Britain and its dependencies. The adoption of *Ivanhoe* as part of school curricula, beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing until the Second World War, I find particularly significant. To my mind, the critical disparagement of the novel, begun well before its loss of popular status, while part of the post-romantic aesthetic programme that placed the highest premium on literature of the individual psyche, was also directly related to the construction of English Studies themselves as necessarily withdrawn from political or sociological tasks. Meanwhile, within the national and imperial educational agenda, the role of literature was being defined in much more instrumental terms, in ways which relied precisely on the *work* which a novel such as *Ivanhoe* could do in the maintenance of specific ideological structures³. I would claim that *Ivanhoe*, consciously or unconsciously, gave imaginative form to a useful and successful myth of the British enterprise, circulating as widely as any formal historical account.

As the case of Shakespeare in *Richard III* and *Henry V* vindicates (Holderness, 1988; Bate, 1989), the potential of *Ivanhoe* to affect popular understanding

3. Christopher Harvie notes that Scott's fiction became «the acknowledged precursor of those reconstructors of historic identity who were to dominate European nationalism in the nineteenth century» (1983, 444; see also Massie, 1983). *Ivanhoe* in particular played a central role in this process, as the examples collected by Buchan (1932: 201), Wilson (1980: 208), Ochojowski (1973), and Jack (1973), amongst others, indicate. Perhaps the most interesting case is quoted by Karonia in her study of the reputation of Scott in Hungary. She notes: «When *Ivanhoe* was first translated into Hungarian in 1829 the translator made it clear that he undertook the job as a patriotic duty, and so did the publisher who declined all profit» (273—since this was presumably András Taisz's six-volume translation it was no small sacrifice to make!). In general, the production of *Ivanhoe*-like historical novels all over Europe was strongly associated with the emergence of national narratives «imagining» the authenticating past of new national consciousnesses. While poetry was an essential demonstration of the reality of a national language, historical fiction was the natural vehicle for circulating the key narratives of national culture and cultural formation. Although its vivid recreation of the past, its medievalism, may well have contributed to *Ivanhoe*'s success overseas as in Britain, its ideological undertones were an essential ingredient in its influence on several emerging national literatures.

of the past and the notion of the synthetic nation-state comes not from some brilliant aesthetic strategy that defeats a «true» representation of history, but from its attachment to already circulating ideological notions. For *Ivanhoe* these include the following: notions about the first «heroic» king in English history, the focus for a whole series of national legends about strength and fidelity; folktales about the democratic tastes of good kings; concepts of exogamic ethnic strengthening, attached to language but also to stereotypes of national type and national behaviour; notions about military strength (e.g., the combination of chivalric prowess with the potential of the «English» long-bow that here partly defines Richard's Englishness and preserves his life, but which really belongs to the later successes of Agincourt, Crécy and Poitiers); legends which associate the «native» with a «local habitation» and hence with both nature and the «national» soil (legends echoing interestingly in the treatment of the outlaws). All these are features evident in the later circulation of the *Ivanhoe* story and those versions of the Robin Hood story influenced by the novel.

The melding of Norman and Saxon in the person of Richard I was presumably widely understood to prefigure or typify the experience of Scots and English, brought together under one crown in 1603, constitutionally linked by the 1707 Union, «now», in 1819, hopefully evolving towards a new Great British alignment. It is easy to see *Ivanhoe* as a novel as much concerned about the evolution of the synthetic British subject as about the evolution of the English subject. I would speculate that it was precisely its contribution to the great sustaining myth of the Empire which explains the repeated appearance of *Ivanhoe* on school syllabuses and examination curricula well into the 1950s, in Britain, Australia, India and elsewhere. There is of course a grim irony in *Ivanhoe*'s success, given the ever-increasing absorption or complicity of Scotland within the United Kingdom or Britain during Scott's life, an absorption he resisted but also from which he benefited. Benedict Anderson answers the question of why Scotland did not become more nationalist towards the end of the eighteenth century (as so many places in Europe did) by suggesting that, unlike the American States, say, or Ireland, Scotland had access to the administration of the nation state and to «English» as a language, i.e., that it shared fully in the image of Britain. The account of the battle for control of «access» to the good seats at Ashby in Chapter 8, access protected as much by the Saxons as by the Normans, might then be a fable of the success of the forging of the Briton as subject, Scottish aristocratic complicity in the Union, and, at the same time, a token of Scott's own ambivalent participation in the subordination of Scottish local identity to a more competitive and fateful imperial citizenship.

Other implications of the Ashby scene might be framed within the analogies between *Ivanhoe* and political processes in Scott's time. Accounts of the creation of the identity of England in *Ivanhoe* tend to assume it to be linguistic and cultural. Saxon and Norman represent an advantageous ethnic mixture, a potential for successful combination of institutions (i.e., strong Norman

feudal sovereignty with free Saxon parliaments and courts), languages and habits. But, as one or two critics have pointed out, there are some interesting class parallels too, and here the sub-textual ideological structures of the novel begin to do further work. Scott's writing is not that of a romantic feudalism, rather that of a Burkean conservative, anxious to reject unfettered and arbitrary power as much as mob rule. The rejection of tyranny in the novel is effectively imaged in, for example, the fall of the castle of Torquilstone, not only an exciting episode, the kind of «boy's own» adventure story that everyone agrees Scott wrote quite well, but also a metonym for local tyranny in ruins, defeated by the combination of a brave and concerned ruler and his loyal and liberty-conscious people. But the anxieties of *Ivanhoe* in the end seem to me to be less about resistance to tyranny than about the potential for anarchy that follows tyranny. In this sense, the novel is Scott's equivalent of Shakespeare's Wars of the Roses cycle. The historical context is crucial here. The years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars were tense ones for conservative politicians, as the pent-up frustrations of moderate and radical reformists stimulated working-class audiences into open action around Britain. In August 1819 the disaster of Peterloo⁴ brought the culmination of this unrest, occurring just as Scott was writing *Ivanhoe*. From a modern perspective the Government's repression of the radical democratic dissent of 1819 was crushingly effective: the gagging acts of 1819 left Sidmouth and the government in almost dictatorial control of the country. But it was not so clear to Scott and his circle that they were safe from a threatening democratic storm. Rather than an *escapist* text looking away from the problems of the age back to the «romantic» middle ages, I, like Brown or Wilson (1984), see *Ivanhoe* as a distinctive combination of powerful images of political life, motivated by Scott's response to such contemporary issues.

Take the following passage from the scene of the Tournament at Ashby which describe the «sufficiently miserable» (Scott, 1852, 16:99) condition of England under Prince John's regentship, an account highly relevant to what I am proposing about the novel. Roaming the land are bands of «lawless resolute» (ibid., 100), «accomplished in the vices of the East, impoverished in substance, and hardened in character, and who placed their hopes of harvest in civil commotion»; in addition, there are bands of outlaws «driven to despair by the oppression of the feudal nobility», for, unchecked by central authority, the nobles raise private armies and tyrannize over their neighbours. John and the Norman landowners raise money from moneylenders to support their behaviour «at the most usurious interest, which gnawed into their estates like consuming cankers». Scott concludes:

4. «Peterloo» or the Manchester Massacre refers to a mass meeting, held in St. Peter's Fields on 16 August 1819, of cotton workers demanding manhood suffrage, which was dispersed by a charge of cavalry in a cruel and unnecessary manner. Viscount Sidmouth, mentioned below, was Home Secretary at the time.

Under the various burdens imposed by this unhappy state of affairs, the people of England suffered deeply for the present, and had yet more dreadful cause to fear for the future. To augment their misery, a contagious disorder of a dangerous nature spread through the land; and, rendered more virulent by the uncleanness, the indifferent food, and the wretched lodging of the lower classes, swept off many whose fate the survivors were tempted to envy, as exempting them from the evils which were to come. (Scott, 1852, 16:101)

The disease is clearly both literal and allegorical. The evocation of a land ravaged by the effects of discord between elements of its population and threatened with the prospect of outright civil war seems to resonate pointedly with the distressed condition of Britain in 1819. Consider the narrative at this point: the disloyalty of John and some of the nobles to the constitutional structures under which a *civil* society might subsist, opens the country to a host of disasters and warring factions. Scott vividly represents these: the potential power of transnational pseudo-religious and cosmopolitan communities such as the Templars; the violence of self-interested men of power, of varying degrees of moral quality (from Front-de-Boeuf to De Bracy and his ambivalently named Free Companions); and the plague of potentially communistic popular movements, again of varying degrees of morality (from the loyal and hierarchically organized community of Robin Hood's forest-dwellers down to those bands of «lawless resolute», «accomplished in the vices of the East», etc., mentioned so early in the novel). Only by the reimposition of an idealized, feudal constitutional monarchy (talismanically acknowledged by the outlaws) is there any hope that the disparate political forces and classes of the country will be successfully united to wrench «Merry England» out of the hands of aliens, villains and radicals. Each of the fictional threats has its counterpart in Scott's personal demonology of contemporary political life (as seen in *The Visionary*, for example): Scott's lingering anti-Catholicism, mild anti-Semitism and interest in Freemasonry play a role in the depiction of the Templars; wealthy manufacturers without an interest in land and politicians only protective of their personal interests, both currently undermining Britain's established parliamentary constitution, could be seen as analogous to the medieval freebooters; the bands of lawless wanderers are clearly equivalent to the «mobs» of radicals and strikers Scott so despised. *Ivanhoe*, by apparently resolving in its narrative the class conflicts of history, offers a means by which to imagine the triumphant destiny of England, by vividly demonstrating the *community* of interests (between king, landowners, yeomen and peasants) on which this destiny might be supposed to depend. Analogically this process might then be transferable to the imagining of «Britain» and the «British» (concepts of extraordinary artificiality whose fragility is only now beginning to be fully recognized (Nairn, 1977)).

As with so many discourses of nationalism, the narrative which reconstructs the past in order to glorify the present must rapidly obliterate all sites of conflict. So, although the opposition of Norman and Saxon runs through-

out *Ivanhoe*, a series of images redirect that conflict into a much less threatening arena by making, in typical melodramatic style, the most villainous Norman characters in the book not only anti-Saxon, but also essentially *alien*. Nothing could be more fitting in 1819 than for Waldemar Fitzurse to be banished to his castle «in France». (Given that Richard I spent a great deal of time and eventually died for the principle that his domains in the British Isles and on the Continent were not separate countries, this is somewhat of an irony.) *Ivanhoe*, of course, unlike Scott's political pamphleteering, is a great deal more than a neat fable about the need of various sections of society to unite against threats to the continuing well-being of the community. But it does work, I suggest, towards a similar end imaginatively, circulating an ideology of national co-operation between interests that might be seen (certainly by left-wing historians) as essentially opposed, in favour of the maintenance of an «imagined community» able to resist the alien, the entrepreneurial, the radical.

I am particularly interested in the ways in which Scott specifically used Robin Hood stories to secure and extend his revolutionary narrative. Consider Scott's treatment of the idea of the origins of Locksley. By 1819, the most widely accepted account of Robin Hood's putative origins identified him as a dispossessed nobleman. Already an accretion to the popular late-medieval stories, this notion had appeared first in the Scottish chroniclers, who Scott certainly knew well. The eccentric antiquary and democrat, Joseph Ritson, a correspondent of Scott's, whose widely influential «literary» collection of the ballads and traditions of Robin Hood was first published in 1795, positively identified Robin Hood as being born at Lockesley in Nottingham County in 1160, real name Robert Fitzooth. By contrast, Scott returned to the older image of Robin Hood as essentially a *yeoman* hero, attempting to associate him and his followers not just with self-interested resistance to the feudal forest laws, but also with a mythical still-active Saxon alternative to arbitrary, monarch-less feudal rule. The Friar Tuck figure in the novel, the Clerk of Copmanhurst, exchanges a *Saxon* toast with his disguised guest — Richard, proving his pan-English interests again — (Scott, 1852, 16: 250, see also 16: 255, 276); the outlaws «were chiefly peasants and yeomen of Saxon descent» (ibid., 276); Locksley is naturally supportive of Cedric and Athelstane (ibid., 286) and Locksley appeals to Richard to aid in the rescue at Torquilstone to show his sympathies with Saxons. It is possible that Scott may have been more sensitive than others to analogies between stories told about Robin Hood and those about the one real Anglo-Saxon resistance leader, the numinous Hereward the Wake in the 1070s (Keen, 1977), but it is more likely we have here a conjuncture that says much about positioning of *Ivanhoe* in relation to contemporary political discourses.

A case can be made, for example, for seeing Scott's reinvention of Robin Hood as a deliberate intervention in the interpretation of the legends. To Ritson, Locksley was a democratic hero, a Lafayette, abandoning his class to wage a struggle on behalf of the disenfranchised:

a man who, in a barbarous age, and under a complicated tyranny, displayed a spirit of freedom and independence which has endeared him to the common people, whose cause he maintained (for all opposition to tyranny is the cause of the people), and, in spite of the malicious endeavours of pitiful monks... to suppress all record of his patriotic exertions and virtuous acts, will render his name immortal. (1887 edition, I, xi)

To Scott, Locksley was more like his friend Robert Erskine, a gentlemanly yeoman, loyal to the ideal of an old-established constitution. Throughout *Ivanhoe*, the libertarian aspects of the popular Robin Hood legends are down-played. Although the novel's outlaws do clearly steal from the rich and levy fines on passers-by, especially on the well-off and the clergy, they are not the «primitive rebels» that dominate some versions of the stories. Again the contrast with Ritson's *Robin Hood* is evident, for he stresses the image of the outlaws as exercising a kind of primitive communism.

My point is that the appearance of the novel at the beginning of 1820 vividly put into the mass public domain a version of the story of Robin Hood which connected the by then canonical story of Robin's aid to Richard I against Prince John to a fiction of the continuing resistance of the Saxons to their Norman conquerors, creating a version which was immediately popular, one which to some extent replaced existing traditions. By refusing Ritson's description of Robin as the dispossessed Earl of Huntingdon, Scott not only showed an appreciation of an essential part of the whole popular ballad-tradition, but also connected him to resistance to tyranny affected neither by radicalism (as Ritson's Robin Hood so evidently was) nor by disloyalty. Instead, Scott's narrative embodied Robin Hood's role in confirming the emergence of a distinctive cooperative synthetic national community, one imagined through a fictional reinvention of history.

The conflict-displacing process of inclusion within the nation state I have defined, which is powerfully imaged in the novel and which is, I believe, one of the reasons why *Ivanhoe* was such a favoured model in the schools of the Empire, is paralleled by the imaging of the process of exclusion from the nation-state, important even to synthetic nation-states such as the England of the novel or the Britain which I think the novel encodes. To define themselves nations exclude that which seems to threaten their coherency and well-being. As Patrick Wright puts it,

the «nation» acts within the culture as a «ground for the proliferation of other definitions of what is normal, appropriate, or possible». If the maintenance of hegemony depends upon the winning of assent and upon the regular mobilization of consensus, then the idea of the nation is an important medium through which this consensus can be drafted. (Turner, 1986: 108)

And, as Renan observed, nations need to forget, as well as to forge, many things (Anderson, 1991: 199-201). While Scott's fiction carefully papers over some of the glaring fissures in society, glueing together disparate interest groups

in a fiction of a genetically richer race, it also represents processes of the repudiation of the unacceptable.

Two groups of characters stand out as unassimilable: the Jews, as represented in the foreground of the fiction by Rebecca and Isaac, and the Templars. Both are exiled at the end of the novel. The case of Rebecca is particularly interesting and not just because generations of readers have felt some internal logic in the text which seems to require *Ivanhoe* to marry her rather than Rowena. The ambivalence that her status generates is simply insoluble, not only because she is superfluous to the resolution of conflict, a reminder of the uncontainable existence of ethnic and religious difference, but also because she signifies the Other of gender; her exclusion takes place not because of her weakness, but because of her power. Carrying with her knowledge of science and commerce, the two forces inimicable to the continuing myth of feudalism, she also leaves behind a world in which the accommodation of patriarchy to the state is not threatened by the disruptive forces of sexuality and female self-consciousness. Rebecca is identified as exotic, the unassimilable Other of nationhood: Jewish, Oriental, and dangerously female. The treatment of the Templars is also of great interest. They were as much a potentially alien formation in medieval times as the Jews (as Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* has recently reminded us) and it is onto their brand of cosmopolitanism that Scott appears to concentrate the punishment meted out in actuality fairly evenly between the Templars and the Jews in late twelfth-century England⁵. As in *The Talisman*, the Templars are dangerous and potentially treacherous because their loyalties lie outwith the bounds and bonds of the imagined community of the nation state and thus provide a convenient scape-goat for the whole political structure envisaged by Scott.

Pointing, even sketchily like this, to the treatment of minorities in *Ivanhoe* could lead into a larger discussion of how to read the novel in the very changed circumstances of a late twentieth-century audience in, say, a post-colonial, supposedly multi-cultural but frequently prejudiced society such as Australia, itself deeply paternalistic and conservative in orientation, riven by anxieties about national identity. Here *Ivanhoe's* audience is likely in general to be more female than male, reading within tertiary education institutions, conscious of difference, gender, ethnicity, power relationships. It will certainly be less English and probably less likely than Scott's immediate readership to see a fictional medievalism or political conservatism as possible alternatives to the ills of contemporary life. Especially in intellectual circles there is an understandable

5. Keen records the grim fact, suppressed in *Ivanhoe*, but alluded to by Thackeray, that before the northern knights who joined Richard on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land left York, they seized a number of Jews and burned them, together with the bonds issued over the security of their estates, bonds which, in fact, circulated widely in the period as an essential part of the money supply; Scott is right to represent the Jews as the victims of feudal resistance to early capitalism, but wrong to identify their persecution as the work of only the «bad steward».

suspicion of the nation state itself, that political order to which the ideology of *Ivanhoe* is so closely tied (see R. Crawford, 1992). In such circumstances, can *Ivanhoe* be re-read as an adult text at all? I hope that it is clear from what I have been saying that it is certainly possible to take *Ivanhoe* seriously. But can we read it any better, or with any more enthusiasm? Surely the answer to this rhetorical question can be answered positively. There are other ways of approaching the novel. I have been stressing the seriousness of the text, trying to draw attention to the ways in which the showy spectacle of Scott's imaginative writing nevertheless embodies ideological dimensions of considerable significance. My account, like so many such attempts to do justice to the importance of landmarks, has neglected the entertaining aspect of the novel, its resistance to over-intellectualization and, conversely, its figures of personal despair, disorder and dislocation, those elements that Judith Wilt (1985), for example, has highlighted in Scott's writing. *Ivanhoe* need not be the static landmark of a moment in literary history that some critics have condemned it to be. The spectacle at Ashby with its first great set-piece works textually as entertainment—an invitation to take the seat offered by its engaging narrator and to watch history being staged. The dramatic nature of Scott's writing liberates not only the past from its parchment, but requires an engagement with the present. In our seat in this theatre of history we can respond in many ways to the elements deployed in Scott's exciting and sometimes infuriating text. No matter what these responses are, history is *being made* in *Ivanhoe*, the past itself brought to bear on our imagination of, for example, nationhood. As such it would be a brave prophet who would deny its relevance to the world of the 1990s.

References

- ANDERSON, Benedict (1991). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso. First published 1983.
- BATE, Jonathan (1989). *Shakespearean constitutions: politics, theatre, criticism, 1730-1830*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- BELL, Alan (ed.) (1973). *Scott: bicentenary essays*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.
- BOLD, Alan (ed.) (1983). *Sir Walter Scott: the long-forgotten melody*. London: Vision; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble.
- BUCHAN, John (1932). *Walter Scott*. London: Cassell.
- COLLEY, Linda (1992). *Britons: forging the nation 1707 to 1837*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- CRAWFORD, Robert (1992). *Devolving English literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- DUNCAN, Joseph E. (1968). 'The anti-romantic in *Ivanhoe*'. Devlin, D.D. (ed.). *Walter Scott: modern judgements*. London: Macmillan, p. 142-47. First published *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 9 (1955).
- HARVIE, Christopher (1983). 'Scott and the image of Scotland.' In Bold, p. 17-42.
- HOLDERNESS, Graham (ed.) (1988). *The Shakespeare myth*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- HOLT, J.C. (1989). *Robin Hood*. Rev. ed. London: Thames & Hudson. First published 1982.
- JACK, Ian (1973). «Scott and Italy». In Bell, p. 283-299.
- JOHNSON, Edgar (1970). *Sir Walter Scott: The great unknown*. 2 vols. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- KATONA, Anna (1973). «The impact of Sir Walter Scott in Hungary». In Bell, p. 271-282.
- KEEN, Maurice (1977). *The outlaws of medieval legend*. Rev. ed. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. First published 1961.
- MASSIE, Alan (1983). «Scott and the European novel». In Bold, p. 91-106.
- NAIRN, Tom (1977). *The break-up of Britain*. London: New Left Books.
- OCHOJOSKI, Paul (1973). «Waverley ueber alles — Sir Walter Scott's German Reputation». In Bell, p. 26-70.
- RITSON, Joseph (1832). *Robin Hood: a collection of all the ancient poems, songs and ballads, now extant*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. London: William Pickering. First published 1795. Fifteen more reprints/editions by the end of the nineteenth century.
- SCOTT, Walter (1852). *Waverley novels*. 34 vols. Edinburgh: A. & C. Black.
- TURNER, Graeme (1986). *National fictions*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- WILSON, A.N. (1980). *The laird of Abbotsford*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1984). «Introduction». In his edition of *Ivanhoe*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. vii-xxxi.
- WILT, Judith (1985). *Secret leaves: the novels of Walter Scott*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.